

REGINALD FREDERICK LAWRENCE, 1897-1987

Dr. Reginald Frederick Lawrence, dean of African Arachnology, died in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa on October 9, 1987 at the age of 90, after a brief illness. He left behind a legacy of contributions to science in general and Arachnology in particular which spanned more than 60 years.

Dr. Lawrence was born in the small coastal town of George in the Cape Province of South Africa on March 6, 1897. He was educated from 1908 to 1913 at Saint Andrew's College in Grahamstown, and he matriculated from Tulbagh High School in 1915. He went on to study at the University of Cape Town (then the South African College), but his studies were interrupted by World War I. He spent two years as an infantryman in France, being wounded in 1918. After recovering from his wounds, he returned to his University studies and graduated with his B.Sc. in 1922.

In 1922 he joined the Staff of the South African Museum in Cape Town. At that time his knowledge of Arachnids was minimal, and the then director of the Museum, Dr. Peringuey, hurled the two huge volumes of Simon's *Histoire Naturelle des Araignées* at him and ordered him to absorb the contents if he wanted a job. Borrowing a French dictionary, he succeeded in this task and was appointed on probationary status as assistant in charge of Arachnida, Myriopoda, Reptilia, and Amphibia. The appointment was subsequently made permanent, and he remained at the South African Museum until 1935. During his early years at the South African Museum he began the extensive course of fieldwork that was to mark his entire career. His first collecting expedition in 1923 was to Moçambique, where he traveled alone, much of the time by donkey-back, along the undeveloped coast. For three months each during 1923/1924/1925 he journeyed north into South West Africa, first by rail to the northern part of the territory, and then via ox or donkey wagon through Ovamboland, the Kaokoveld, and to the Angolan border. Lawrence was the only expedition member who could shoot, and his fellow expedition members depended on him to fill the pot with fresh meat, usually springbok, which were then present in many thousands. The extensive collection of Arachnida made during these trips formed the basis for his doctoral thesis, for which he received his Ph.D. from the University of Cape Town in 1928.

In 1935 Dr. Lawrence was appointed Director of the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, where he remained until his retirement in 1964. He edited the *Annals of the Natal Museum* from 1935 until 1964. It was during his time at the Natal Museum that he developed his keen interest in the cryptic fauna of the indigenous forests of southern Africa, culminating in his masterpiece of synthesis, *The Biology of the Cryptic Fauna of Forests*, published in 1953. He recognized the ancient distributional patterns shown by many of these small animals, and appreciated parallel relationships of the African forest biota to other tropical areas and to other temperate southern continents. His pioneering work on southern African forest biogeography serves as an inspiration for a new generation of arachnid biogeographers.

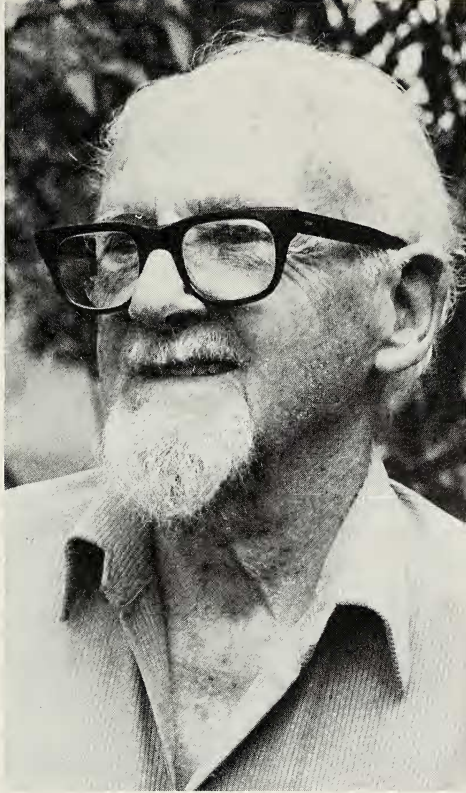


Fig. 1.—Dr. R. F. Lawrence in 1984 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, on the occasion of this 87th birthday. (Photo by P. M. C. Croeser)

Dr. Lawrence was a superb collector, and much of the new material described by him was from his own collections. During his tenure at the Natal Museum he visited indigenous forests from the southern Cape to the Limpopo River, and from the Indian Ocean coast to the crest of the Drakensberg Mountains. During these excursions he was accompanied and assisted by his wife, Ella Thompson Pratt Yule. In addition, he visited and made collections in Madagascar, Mauritius, Moçambique, South West Africa, and Zimbabwe (then southern Rhodesia). The collections amassed by him continue to be a treasure trove of new and exciting taxa, particularly those showing Gondwanan affinities.

Dr. Lawrence published 210 scholarly papers and books during a period spanning nearly 60 years. These covered a wide range of topics, including natural history, biogeography, museology, and the taxonomy and biology of Acarina, Araneae, Chilopoda, Diplopoda, Onychophora, Opiliones, Pedipalpi, Pseudoscorpiones, Reptilia, Scorpiones, Solifugae, and Uropygi. His last book, *The Centipedes and Millipedes of Southern Africa: a Guide*, was published in 1984.

He received numerous honors during his career. In 1935 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa; he was elected President of the Entomological Society of Southern Africa in 1953; in 1956 he was awarded the Medal and Grant of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science, and in 1958 was elected President of Section D of that same society; in 1964 the Natal Museum published a Festschrift in his honor; in 1973 he was

awarded the Medal of the Zoological Society of South Africa; in 1985 he was made an honorary member of the American Arachnological Society; and in 1986 he was made an honorary life member of the South African Museums Association. More detailed biographical sketches may be found in the *Annals of the Natal Museum*, vol. 16, pp. i-ix, 1964; and *American Arachnology*, vol. 21, pp. 13-15, 1980.

Throughout his scientific career, through his retirement, and up until the end of his life, Dr. Lawrence remained a true humanitarian. He was generous, courteous, humble and kind, qualities which he showed to friends and colleagues at all times. Throughout his life he was a solicitous and dedicated correspondent, and spared no effort to be of assistance to established scientists and students alike. Not a letter was received, even from persons that he had never met, that did not receive a careful response. I remember him, at the age of 88, mounting a search in the rugged montane forests of Natal for live specimens of Onychophora which were essential to the doctoral research of a student in Europe. The walking worms were captured alive and duly dispatched via the post to Germany. He was frequently acknowledged for his advice to and efforts on behalf of interested naturalists from around the world. He was a source of support and inspiration to Arachnologists throughout Africa and beyond.

Dr. Lawrence leaves behind two sons, Alastair and Jonathan, two sisters, and many friends and colleagues whose privilege and good fortune it was to have known "Lawrie" during his long and productive life.

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